

GRESFORD and AFTER

A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF THE GRESFORD DISASTER.

THE GRESFORD COLLIERY EXPLOSION.

SEPTEMBER, 22nd. 1934.

By Mr Parry-Jones

GRESFORD and AFTER

A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT OF THE GRESFORD DISASTER THE GRESFORD COLLIERY EXPLOSION SEPTEMBER, 22nd. 1934

As a Captain of one of the Rescue Teams which were employed directly after the explosion, and later in the recovery of parts of the mine which possibly could be worked, I have often been requested to put into writing my actual experiences during the time that work was being carried out.

Many and varied were the reports that appeared in the Press and I wish at this juncture to pay tribute to all the Pressmen and Journalists which at that time were learning all the facts they could get hold of to enable them to place before the Great British Public, the position in which such a huge calamity had placed the little border town of Wrexham. How well they did their job, how hard they worked to do that job night and day, many of them without sleep, and very little food. My hat comes off all the time to these reports who, by their magnificent efforts, were in a very large degree responsible for the great response that was made by the Country to the Appeal made on behalf of those bereaved and destitute by the Mayor of Wrexham and the Lord Mayor of London. Often I have wondered what would have been the position if we had been left to shoulder our burden alone. No, such a thing cannot be considered or contemplated. We must at all times be prepared to marshal our every resource to afford the monetary assistance to those bereaved and distressed, and the assistance must on all occasions be immediate for it to be of real benefit.

I have no desire to reopen the wounds which have partially healed, but I certainly do consider that a truthful account of the conditions which obtained directly after the explosion took place is due to that public which proved itself of high value at the time.

A CALL FOR HELP

I am told that the actual explosion took place about 2 am. A time when all the surrounding district was peacefully slumbering, and in less time than it takes to tell, the news was being quickly circulated, officials were being awakened by telephone and 'knockers up'. What is the matter?. An Explosion? My God! and in every stage of undress, very soon the pithead shows activity that had to be seen to be believed. No matter when the extent of the explosion may be, precautions must be made at the local hospitals to receive the casualties and while one section is making these arrangements, another is preparing to descend the Pit, to, they know not what. Those men who we down the pit at the time of the explosion, and who, by God's Providence had not been affected (working in another part of the Pit) and on this occasion unhappily only too few, have come to the surface, but very little information in the section have been accounted for, then it is realised by the trouble in the 'Dennis Pit' and naturally that is the route taken by the first exploration party. In the meantime there had been a call has been sent to the neighbouring Colliery , Llay Main, for them to muster all their rescue men and send them immediately that short distance of one and a half miles which separates the two collieries. It was 4.30 am on that fateful morning that I was awakened by some terrific knocking at the front door of my home (some knocking exactly similar to that which happened at 4am on Friday, December 11th. 1924 when an explosion occurred at

Llay Main in the Two Yard Seam when nine men lost their lives. Was it premonition? I was sick at heart as I answered that knocking. The message, *"All Rescue man are needed at Gresford - 300 men down the Pit, and only a very few have got out."* What a request, and what hopes of doing a lot for 300 men ran through my mind. Good Lord grant that many of them have returned to the surface during the time that message has been in transit to me, but it is now two and a half hours after the explosion and those that are able would surely have come to the surface before this. From my past experience of explosions I could see nothing but stark disaster and very little hope of rescuing those poor comrades. All this was flashing through my mind as I was throwing my clothes on. But what of my home?. Only the previous week I had lost my little daughter 5 years of age. The joy of my life and the very apple of my eye. The tears were still wet on my cheeks, and sighs were still issuing from my heart. Surely my cross was already heavy enough. I had a full load, and yet here was more. A call for help, and had the load been double, here was something which surely no one could refuse. my duty was pointed out to me quite clearly, and the home I was leaving must try to bear the burden and hope for the best.

Shortly before 5 a.m. we had collected a team of 5 men together at the Ambulance Room at Llay Colliery, and jumping into a motor lorry we were soon on the scene at Gresford. Apart from one or two odd, unattached rescue men employed at Gresford Colliery we were the only team then on the job, the complete Gresford Team being already below ground. The scene was indescribable, crowds of men and women and children grouped about in the Pit Yard waiting for news of their sons, husbands and fathers. Daylight was fast approaching and the weather was terrible. Raining and cold, may be a deep and poignant feeling of distress was responsible for the cold feeling. were are able to learn some little information from those who have come out of the pit after the explosion. They had already been to their homes to give some little comfort to their loved ones, and the returned to the Colliery to be of assistance if called upon.

What a splendid spirit! No sacrifice too big to make, and if they only stopped to consider, they will appreciate the fact that they had already been very, very fortunate to be out, and that they are just tempting Providence when they re-enter the Pit, inviting a second throw of the dice. I am miserable we have no proper place to settle in, out equipment is dumped in an old cabin, and being knocked and kicked about by all and sundry. My life is going to depend on that apparatus and I am in no mood to see it jumped on. This is not good enough, nerves on edge, it is essential that my team are more settled or there is going to be difficulties when we are needed, and in a very short time after an interview with the manager of Llay Main, we are immediately transferred, men and equipment into the General Offices, where tea and coffee was soon on the go, prepared by the lady caretaker of the Offices.

Still no call for further assistance down below. The exploration party, by this time re-enforced by some of his Majesty's Inspectors of Mines are still searching for means of possible escape if any are yet alive, and in the meantime, a few dead bodies have been brought up and placed in a temporary mortuary on the Pit Yard. "Move you equipment again" this time to the Joiner's Shop, the General Office is needed for conferences, off we go bag and baggage. This waiting period is far worse than the actual work. Good Lord when are they going to call us? Three hours and twenty minutes waiting, and by this time the whole of the Rescue Teams, 18 men, have arrived on the job from Llay Main, some of them have already worked all through the night down Llay Main. It does not matter to them that they may have to do another 24 hours duty.

8.40 a.m. a team wanted down below! Now we shall soon see how we stand, and like a team of demons, the No. 1 team of Llay colliery don their apparatus. William Hughes one of the Gresford

Team unattached, accompanies them, he will be very useful as a guide. Each man of the team fully experienced in the use of the 'Proto' apparatus he is wearing realises fully that his existence depends entirely on the functioning of those little valves in his intake and exhaust pipes. That he has sufficient reserve of oxygen in the round cylinder strapped on his back. That his nose clip is properly adjusted to obviate the possibility of him inhaling through the nose. All this they know and all this they must not forget.

No.1 team had not been down the pit for more than 20 minutes when a further call was received on the surface, this time to send only two rescue men. This was a strange call, a team of 5 men is trained as a single unit and each man of the team had definite duties while working with his team, and he can hardly be dovetailed into another team. What has happened? Have two of the first team dropped out? But no, that cannot be the reason, if any member of a Team is unable to go forward, then the rule is the whole team to retire. While I am still seeking a solution to the mystery, there came a further message for all available rescue men to be sent down. It is now perfectly clear that something had happened to the No.1 Team and as we hurried to the Pit Bank to be lowered down in the "Dennis Cage." A very popular Manager at a North Wales Colliery who had just returned from below ground said these words to me "You can save no life down there. It is too late." I swallowed a lump which rose in my throat and thanked him. It was a case of looking after ourselves as we could help none, but the Manager must not have known about the Rescue men who were in distress.

When the cage was lowered to the Pit Bottom and we stepped off, we were met by a Deputy whom I was well acquainted with. He told me to hurry my team up as the first Rescue Team had got into difficulties, and as quick as possible we travelled down the "Dennis Deep" to '20's Wind Road', coming through a narrow passage to a shutter that had been knocked out of the brick stopping. There we met two rescue men who together with others were carrying the body of one of the first rescue team and we helped them along to a point where a doctor was waiting ready to render any aid that was possible. It must be made clear, that at this point the air was perfectly clear, and we had not yet had to use our apparatus, the road we were in, being a cross connection between the intake and return airways. We then travelled along this road to a point within a few yards of the return airway and here we found an official who tried to rush us into a death trap, naturally I refused to be hurried and demanded to know his qualifications and for what purpose were we to go into an air course fully loaded with CO (carbon monoxide) and from where already one rescue man had been carried out dead. Did he want to see others in the same plight? I don't think for a moment that he did but someone had made a blunder, and some careful thinking was needed before any further action was taken. For what reason had the team been sent into this return airway, when it was already known that it was utterly impossible for anything to be alive in such an atmosphere? Why was it considered necessary to send another team, with nothing to gain and the possible loss of further lives?

The heat was terrific and the fumes unbearable, these themselves sufficient indication, that nothing could live, unless they had the apparatus.. Questions elucidated the fact that other men of the first team were still in this airway and in difficulty. Then there was something to go for and the order is given to couple up the apparatus and make tracks into the foul atmosphere filling what was known as '20's Return Airway'.

We had not gone for more than 20 yards down when we came upon the C.F.A. lamp which had been used by the man we had met being carried out, and travelling a further 150 yards we came across the body of the second rescue man, lying face downwards with his head towards the pit

bottom. This was the body of William Hughes the Gresford rescue man who had accompanied the first Llay Main Team down the pit. Still further down the roadway we could see a light, and this gave us an idea how long it would take to reach him, but first of all we must get the body back that we have already got to. There is just a possibility that those wonderful Doctors working in the fresh air may be able to revive him and dragging, lifting and pulling we are at least able to deliver him into the hands of those good Doctors.

We are preparing to return to fetch the man back from where we had seen the lamp in the distance when the Inspector of Mines and the Gresford Manager called a halt and would not be persuaded to allow you to go back a second time. Members of the team implored them to give us the opportunity "Don't let us leave him. The reputation of all the Rescue Men is at stake", but all our pleas had no effect and we were ordered out of the pit, and the order given by those responsible officials to fence the roadway off. The Captain of the first team which had lost three good men, was himself very badly affected by the poisonous gas and had to be assisted to the Surface. He himself had struggled with the first man of his team that collapsed, and had become so exhausted himself, that he was only just got out himself in time to be kept alive.

The experience of losing 3 rescue men and the first decent caused the operations to be suspended for a time, until some definite plan of campaign had been formed, and as other teams and equipment had arrived from other parts of North Wales and Lancashire. It was decided to form shifts and relays of rescue men and at 4 p.m. to attack the job from the intake side where it was found that a fire was raging. It had already been ascertained that the return airway to the 'Martin Pit' was full of dense smoke, and although falls of roof down the 'Dennis Deep' made it impossible to get at once to the seat of the fire. Steps were taken about erecting brattice cloths to keep as much air as possible away from the fire. Rescue men with apparatus and volunteers without apparatus worked continually through Saturday night, removing falls. Thousands of fire extinguishers were taken down the pit and even those from small private cars throughout the district were requisitioned. Loads of charged chemical extinguishers were brought to the colliery, and loads of empty cylinders were returned to Monsanto Chemical Works at Cefn for refilling.

We as a team we were, according to schedule, to report for duty at 5 am. Sunday and accordingly were lowered down the pit at that time and proceeded to continue the work which had been going on all through the night. Falls had been removed, twisted tubs and girders put on one side and the work was speedily approaching '29's Junction'.

There the whole of the Junction had collapsed in one huge fall, and the fire was still smouldering under the fall. If one moved a piece of dirt and allowed what little air there was to get to the smouldering timber, it would immediately burst into flame. Our object was to find the entrance to '29's Level' which was completely closed up. After one hour's solid hard work, handing the hot stones back to others and working in turn, the rescue team found the entrance. It had been considered possible that some of the men could be behind some doors just inside the entrance to this Level but "Bend down and look". What a sight! The whole of the level end is just one mass of flame, the coal side of the roadway, burning in one white mass, and the more stones we removed to one side, the more air we put on to the flames, and the fire roaring away.

It was most peculiar to see the flames from that fire, all the colours of the rainbow, a sight which I will never forget. We were relieved at 9 a.m. and the other teams put on to follow up. No mention is yet made of abandoning this line of advance, although everyone realises that with the roadway burning in such a way, and the wooden roof supports on fire, that it is next to impossible to make

the advance quick enough to be of assistance to those beyond. Later during the morning the Miner's Representatives met us on the surface and asked what the position was. We told them there was no hope, and that it would be better to call out all the men as the pit looked to be on fire, and there was a grave possibility of further explosion which would involve the lives of 200 more men who were engaged in rescue operations.

They would not listen to this at this stage, and went down the pit to see the position for themselves. Owners, Mines Inspectors, and the Representatives of the men must all agree before there can be an abandonment of trying to find some living soul, and who will say they have not a very grave responsibility? After every avenue had been explored, none found practicable, and then there is only one thing remains to be done. If we are satisfied that no lives can be saved, and that to continue the operation there is a possibility of the Death Roll being increased and possibly nearly doubled, then there is only one decision to make. Withdraw all men and take steps to kill the fire by excluding all air to the fire. This decision was taken during the afternoons of Sunday and all men withdrawn by the order of Sir Henry Walker, Chief Inspector of Mines by 6pm.

Let me record here the splendid work done throughout Saturday night and Sunday by the willing band of volunteers, many of them quite young lads, others who were down the pit for the first time and doing work to which they had never been accustomed, motorists from far and near volunteered to go down the pit, and one could see them walking very gingerly carrying cans of coffee and sandwiches up to the men working on the falls of ground.

This is the spirit which makes us all proud to be British. Did they realise the possibility of a second explosion? and if they did, did they care? Not a little bit.

SEALING THE PITS

Arrangements were made immediately all the men were withdrawn to seal off the top of each shaft and by this means exclude all possible air from getting to the seat of the fire. The fan was stopped and stages built over the mouth of the pits and on these were placed hundreds of tons of sand and, sad to relate, whilst this work was being done, there was still another victim, one of the Gresford employees who was putting on the seals over the pits being killed by the force of a second explosion which blew off all the seals they had made. When it was realised, that the force of the explosion travelled up the shaft 700 yards deep, had lifted the seal, and also rolled the steel joists which formed the fan race, then one can understand the force on the explosion at its inception. Still other explosions took place, 5 in all, and the pit must have been a burning hell. What caused the latter explosions will never be known. Some day it might be found what caused the first, but even this will be more or less conjecture!. After the seals were completed, there was movement in the vicinity and the surrounding districts to erect a monument and to consecrate the pits as the tomb of those 265 men who were still down there.

DECISION TO OPEN THE PITS

After a period of five months had elapsed the authorities concerned decided to make an attempt to open the pits with trained Rescue Men, and to try to ascertain what was the cause in the first place of the explosion, and if possible to avoid such similar occurrence at other Collieries, A call was made through the Press of the country was made for volunteers to train for Rescue Work.

Hundreds answered the call, men of all occupations, men from London, Manchester, Liverpool, in fact every city and town was represented in the list of volunteers, but there was sufficient response from around the district, and special training at the Wrexham Rescue Station, with the Doctor from the Ministry of Mines and the Inspector of Mines coaching and watching the men daily for a whole month. Some of the volunteers who were accepted had never in their lives had an apparatus on their back, although they all had pit experience, and they adapted themselves to the new conditions at the Station in a most remarkable way.

During the time this special training was being carried out, work constructing an air lock over the 'Martin Pit' at Gresford was being carried done, so that by the time all the men were fully trained and perfectly fit the shaft would be ready for their descent.

The training proved to be pretty strenuous starting off at a rate of 4 miles per hour round the station Yard, full kit and breathing oxygen, each man in turn falling out to wheel a barrow load of sand, then into the specially constructed galleries building stoppings of wood block, timbering, bratticing, and various other classes of work as done in the pit. Constantly under the supervision of the Doctor and the Inspector. The strict training we were undergoing was reflected in the face of each man. Everyone was getting as 'fit as a fiddle'. Later during training each team was taken to Hafod or Llay Main and sent down the pit to do actual repair work. My Team was sent to Llay Main and we had been supplied with a new apparatus to test.. This of course was the same type that we always had, except that the capacity of the breathing bag was much smaller, and at first this fact was rather embarrassing as when one had a little extra exertion, one was rather left gasping for breath, but after a few more practices, one became accustomed to them and we had a very great affection for them, as they were 7 lbs lighter than the old type.

Is there anything in the number 13? Personally I never cared to be associated with the number, but it fell to my lot to have No.13 apparatus issued to me, and this was to be solely mine during the recovery work. I confess I felt a bit shaky, being a little superstitious, but after the first two or three days it proved to be a good friend, and during the whole of the recovery operations No. 13 never let me down.

RECOVERY OPERATIONS STARTED

Now the big day has arrived, all men are re-examined by the Doctors, and all have to pass a practical test with the apparatus, and to prove his knowledge and functions of the various parts. The airlock at the top of the shaft is completed and the trained men with the equipment are needed to take off the seal. It is realised that when this is done, the poisonous gases which have been put up in the pit by the sand stopping, will rise and soon fill the airlock just as soon as the seal was removed. There, no one could possibly live without the apparatus. On examination, it was found that the winding ropes, and the chains from the rope to the cage, after being stood 20 weeks, was not in a condition to think of riding men down the pit, and it was decided that the ropes must be re-capped, but how was this to be done? Only men trained with the apparatus could enter the airlock, and none of them had experience of this kind of work! Then they must adapt themselves to a new profession and get down to being a temporary blacksmith. Take the chains off the cage and detach the rope from the chains, so that the rope could be newly capped. This was done successfully in a minimum of time, put back again, and the job is as sound as ever. All this work done by rescue men wearing the apparatus and breathing oxygen all the time, and this just goes to show how in cases of difficulty an inexperienced man may be taught to carry out

other very important work to which he had never been accustomed.

Still other difficulties make themselves apparent, How are the rescue men to be lowered down the pit and no means of signalling? Can we use a microphone? We try it, no use, different ideas are discussed, but none are satisfactory. Everyone connected with pits know of the gong and hammer which the shaftsman carries in the cage when he is inspecting the shaft. The sound will carry a long way, but what of the water that is pouring down the shaft from the water lodge? A stream at the rate of 25,000 gallons per minute is falling down the shaft and this would deafen the sound of the gong.

Well then, we shall have to stop the water from going down the pit and turn it so it falls down the 'Dennis Pit' instead of the 'Martin Pit'. It only means going as far as the pump house in the shaft, a matter of only 200 yards down, and to go far the ordinary pitman's gong will do. Now the work of turning the water to the 'Dennis Pit' was a tricky piece of work, and the pump house a very difficult place, the entrance being not directly in front of the cage but at the side, with a distance of over half a yard to step from the cage to a foothold at the pump house entrance, and 500 yards of a drop if you missed your footing. That space looked more like two yards than half a yard. We were required to take measurement of the opening at the entrance so that shoring timbers could be sawn and taken to fix across the opening, and afterwards special clay in bricks could be put behind the timbers and so form a dam to a higher level than the opening in the side of the 'Dennis Pit', where the water naturally would go to the lower level. The noise of the falling water was terrific, each man holding on to his life by a mere thread, feet slipping and everything touched wet and 'slimy'. Every man giving half his attention on the job in hand and the other listening to the 'click, click' of the valves in his equipment. This was a very sever trial of nerve and endurance, every men wet through to the skin. Standing in a cage with an open top in the middle of the pit, and not knowing what may fall from above. Rust and slime everywhere above It was possible to make a thorough examination to say that everything was safe. However, the dam was completed by two teams on Monday March 1st. and the pit left to drain itself until March 7th when the first descent was attempted. The weather was similar to that on that fateful morning of the explosion. The March air was nippy although not quite as much a rain falling.

THE FIRST DESCENT

Now what is going to be the fate of the first team? Doom. Are they going to return alive? The reporters present called it the 'Death Trap', the 'Pit of Death' also many other titles were given to the pit. A Special Emergency Rescue Station had been erected at the Colliery where the equipment could be cleaned and refilled with oxygen, also testing and repairing of all equipment.

As the Captain of the team detailed to make the first descent I received a copy of typewritten instructions of which I give in detail.

GRESFORD COLLIERY INSTRUCTIONS TO CAPTAINS OF THE RESCUE TEAMS

The Captain is responsible for his team, and all his members shall obey his instructions.

The Captain and at least one other member of his team, must carry watches, and before going underground he must see that the watches are set at exactly the same time as the watches of Mr

Abbott and Mr Fairhurst or Roberts or Joshua Jones, whichever is at the entrance to the airlock.

The Captain shall ascertain the pressure of oxygen in the cylinders carried by himself and each member of the team at the start, and shall read the gauges every 20 minutes during the first hour, and every ten minutes afterwards, and the chart provided. He shall withdraw the whole of the team if any one of the gauges records only 35 atmospheres.

The code of signals recorded on the back of the Pressure Gauge Chart must be observed:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------|
| a) "Distress" or "Help wanted" | - 1 hoot |
| b) "Halt" | - 2 hoots |
| c) "Retire" | - 3 hoots |
| d) "Advance" | - 4 hoots |
| e) "To call attention" | - 5 hoots |

The Captain shall obtain clear instructions, of what he and his team have to do before proceeding underground, and on no account shall he attempt to carry out any part of such instructions which in his judgement might cause risk of life to any member of his team.

The Captain must see that his team keeps together, and every member of the team must come out with the Captain when the work is completed, or the time limit is reached, or the oxygen supply is getting near 36 atmospheres, or for any other reason.

The Captain must see that his team gets back to fresh air, that is outside the airlock, with not less than 30 atmospheres of oxygen, and under no circumstances, must the team be taken away from fresh air for more than 1 hour 40 minutes.

The Captain must have with him the necessary small tools for the 'Proto' apparatus. He must carry one spare nose clip; he must be careful and warn the members of his team to be careful on entering and leaving the cage.

Don't forget the frequent shaking of the breathing bags to keep the CO₂ absorbent free, this is particularly important with Soda Coke.

Don't forget note book, pencil, chalk, 33ft tape measure and two foot rule.

The Captain must make a written report of the work done, and to report any remarks made by members of his team concerning the apparatus, in the book provided.

FIRST PROCEDURE

Cages to be run up and down the shaft several times to clear pipes, and engine cylinders of water, and to make sure that the winding gear and signals are in order.

Engineer will enter airlock with two members of the team which are to remain to act as banksman and give signals. The engineer will examine the cages, bridle chains, detaching hooks and rope cappings. Also see that the gates on the cages are secure, hang shaft lamp on bridle chains, and when satisfied that everything is in order he will leave the airlock and the first team must then be

ready to descend.

HAVE READY

1. Hammer and Gong on the cage, these must remain there.
2. Hammer and gong to be hung at the bottom of the pit and remain there.
3. Tools comprising, picks, shovels, hammers, hand saws and axes.
4. Stretchers and ambulance requisites.
5. Oxygen reviving set and cylinder of Di-Carbox gas.
6. Spare cylinder of oxygen with fittings and shoulder straps.
7. Materials for stoppings - Scantlings, Boards, 4" and 6" wire nails, Brattice cloth and nails, also a quantity of wedges, hand hammers, wooden blocks, and bags of sand.
8. 1" pipes, 4 feet long, with tapered wooden plugs to be fixed through each stopping near the top so that samples of pent up gas can be taken.
9. 12 electric hand lamps.

SHAFT SIGNALS TO BE USED

Men descending or ascending	- Signal 3
To lower cage	- Signal 2.
To lower cage slowly	- Signal 5.
To raise the cage	- Signal 1.
To raise cage slowly	- Signal 4.
To stop the cage when in motion	- Signal 1.

AFTER ASCENDING

When the cage reaches the stopping place signal '1' and if materials are required from the surface signal '1' for the cage to be raised to the surface. Await the return of the cage, signal '1' to stop it where required. Take materials from the cage, then signal '4' to raise the bottom deck out of the sump. Signal '1' to stop it, and leave it there until required. Signal '2' to lower it when required, then the usual '3' and '1' to ascend

If materials are sent down on a tram or in tubs on the cage, be very careful to fasten the tram or tubs securely with wedges Also when sending the empty tram or tub up on the cage.

Messages to be placed in the leather bag hanging on the cage hand rail.

ON RETURNING TO THE SURFACE

After leaving the airlock, take off nose clops, and mouthpieces, close main valves.

On entering Rescue Room each member of the team to deposit his apparatus in the position marked for the same, and report to the Captain on the conditions.

Each member of the team to carefully dismantle his own apparatus, empty and clean the breathing bag. Also wash out the mouthpieces and air cooler.

When finished deposit the parts at the appointed place, except the breathing tubes which are to be hung up to drain.

It was most important that the breathing bags should be washed out thoroughly before recharging and the gauges must also be cleaned.

As instructions these were to be observed throughout the whole of the recovery operations, and every one of the team had to be thoroughly convergent with them. All of us realised that they had been carefully thought out, and arranged by practical men, and that the instructions were sound common sense, but there was still a lot to do before we could apply some of them.

After the Engineer had made his inspection of the rope cappings, chains, sec. my team was ready to descend with instructions to ascertain that the dam which had previously been put at the entrance of the Pump House, was holding good, and that there was no danger of it giving way, for it this was to happen after the cage was below this level the it was fairly obvious that whichever team was below would be drowned by the sudden inrush of 25,000 gallons of water per minute. Then we were to return to the surface and report to the Inspectors, Directors, and Mr. Abbott who was directing the recovery operations. After reporting we then had to descend again, and ride down to the 'meetings', that is where the ascending cage passes the descending cage in the shaft. The object being to satisfy ourselves, and the people responsible that the cages would pass without catching each other. We were then to again return to surface and report, leaving the remainder of the shaft to be examined by the next team.

These instructions were pretty clear and easily remembered, and after being examined still once more, this time by two Doctors, and all the apparatus fully tested and passed we are ready for the 'Death Trap' so freely spoken of. No persons were allowed in the Pit Yard except those holding permits, but it appeared to us that all the Pressmen, Photographers and B.B.C. representatives in the British Isles, had received these permits. Cameras were on the tops of cars, on legs and held in the hands and one could hardly get through the throng to reach the pit.

Along the Chester-Wrexham Road outside the Colliery Yard were lines of cars and hundreds of people. Why were they all there? Curiosity? No, many of them praying to God, that we should return and that the roll would not be greater. Every precaution had been taken, and the arrangements made with the winding engineman regarding the signals etc. It was arranged that he should lower us down to the point where we had been on the Monday (the Pump House), and then every 20 yards below this point he was to stop without a signal, and then if he did not receive a signal to lower further, he must bring us back up. If he continued to receive a signal then all was well. If he did not receive a signal, probably the cause would be that the sound of the gong was

not reaching the rescue man acting as Banksman, or probably another cause I need not mention. Sound and definite instructions had been given, we were to go so far, and no further, and prior to entering the airlock, watches were compared pipes coupled to the mouthpieces, and with all good wishes from the Coal Owners, Doctors, Engineers and Inspectors, we were once more inside and on the cage, each one of us absolutely confident that the apparatus we were wearing would not fail us, and that the precautions that had been taken gave us an even chance of coming back up again.

"DOWN SO FAR SO GOOD"

What at time? What a thrill? What anxious moments for everyone concerned? Those on the surface seeing those wheels revolving so slowly. Every minute an eternity, every time the wheels stopped an anxiety. Are they all right? Is the dam holding? We could imagine all this from the responsible officials. These were the most anxious moments of the re-opening of the Gresford Colliery after being closed for 6 months. We are now down to the Pumping House entrance, and examining the dam. Thank God it is holding, and doing all that is needed. There is very little water coming through, but what was falling down the shaft was making a din as it dropped into the water 500 yards below. Anyway the dam is holding and our instructions are to return to the surface to report our findings to those eager anxious waiting people. Up to now this trip had been quite easy. What was in store for us on the second descent when we were to go 150 yards further down to the 'meetings'? Each member of the Team realised, that in going below the Pump House level, that he was dependent on his own examination of the dam having been of a minute character, and that if his judgement had been at fault then his life was the toll that would be taken, but we were thoroughly satisfied that the dam was doing its work and that given ordinary conditions it would continue to do so.

Now we were passing the Pump House on the second descent, stopping as arranged every 20 yards. Signalling '2' to lower us further, the noise of the falling water into the bottom is now getting louder and as we are passing one of the garlands, (a cast iron recessed ring built in the shaft bricking in the water bearing strata) we find that a good deal of water is falling from this, but the noise below is far greater than the quantity. Lower and lower, still very slowly. Stopping as arranged, then going down and down till we see the chains of the ascending cage. Will it pass without catching out cage or will it catch and upset us, throwing us out of the cage into the water 350 yards below? Every inch it moved nearer, all eyes on the chain and ears listening to the valves in the apparatus. It is a real funny time which one can hardly describe. No fear, still anxiety. Seconds seemed ages. We moving down so slow, the ascending cage coming up to meet us just as slow.

By now the anxiety is over. The up-going cage is passing well clear of ours, and as we watch it, it comes into line with us and we signal "stop" later signalling '7' to indicate to the winder the fact that the cages are dead level, so that he could mark his indicator on the engines, the point of the 'meetings' in the shaft, It is then necessary that we should go just a little lower to be able to see the underside of the ascending cage and make certain that there was nothing loose hanging from it which was likely to fall down the shaft as the next team descending was to go below the point we had marked, After making the examination was signalled to be drawn back to the surface and reported our findings.

DOWN TO THE PIT BOTTOM

After the next team for duty had passed through the same searching examination as we had been subjected to, they were given their instructions. The same method as before to be adopted, get down to the 'meetings' and then every 20 yards the engineman to stop and signal to be given from those on the cage to lower a further 20 yards. They were to proceed to the pit bottom and make an examination of the 'landing'. Would they be able to reach the landing? How about the water we had heard? They were descending on what was known as the 'Gresford Cage'. The nearest side to the Gresford Village. The one nearest Wrexham was called the 'Wrexham Cage and all went well with the descent until they reached the supposed 'landing'. The lower deck of the cage would not lower into the sump, below the landing. What a sensation when they could hear the chains on the cage slackening and banging on top of the cage and they not sure that their signal could be heard on the surface. Providence was once more kind to them. Their signal to be raised back to the surface was heard, and then answered, and soon they were on the surface reporting their eerie experience. Well if that cage will not lower into the sump then they must go down the Wrexham cage and down they went to see if that cage would lower sufficiently far enough to enable them to get off at the landing.

It will be readily understood that nerves would be all shaken after their first experience, but without a murmur and no hesitation they were back and going down. There was no difficulty this time. The descending cage was lowered to the 'Landing Level' and as the bottom deck of the cage was being lowered in the sump one can imagine the feelings of those men. One yard of a mistake by either signals or winding engineman and they would be lowered into the water to be drowned like rats in a trap drain.

After they had examined the condition of the landing they returned to the surface, reported on it's condition and also the condition of the lower part of the shaft. The first part of our venture had been completed successfully.

CARRY ON

The ovation that the second team received on their return to the surface will live long in my memory. They were met by crowds of people who could no longer be restrained. Their emotion and enthusiasm carried them into the Pit Yard to congratulate those brave lads on their achievement.

The third team is now ready after passing the preliminaries. They are to go further again and explore and report on the road leading from the pit bottom. It is impossible to describe the havoc which met their gaze when they got off the cage many of the men in the third team were well acquainted with the pit bottom prior to the explosion in September and even they could not realise that this was the same place that they knew so well.

The floor of the roadway was lifted up, rails and sleepers all torn up and strewn about the place in an indescribable manner, the brick walls in the pit bottom all broken down, heavy sections of girders bent and broken pointing in all directions, the 'landing' and 'scaffolding' all blown to pieces and need needing renewing. This team had a peep at the 'Pit Bottom Office' or 'Bosshole' for the first time since the explosion. Was it the same place they had known previously? They could not be sure, but it must be. It only appeared to be a small cavity in the brick wall but there were some

books etc. and this must be the place they had known as the 'Bosshole'. The damage done to the place was appalling. What could they report on arrival back at the surface? It would take a lifetime to fire anything like an accurate description of the havoc below. However this completed the first days work of the exploration of the Gresford Colliery and I for one was feeling very pleased that all we had been asked to do had been done successfully and without further loss of life.

One can imagine the grave looks and puckered expressions on the faces of those officials responsible for opening the pit after they had received the report of the third team down. What had caused those terrific later explosions? Was it the fire after the first 'Dennis' explosion that had ignited the gas after the sealing of the shafts? Theirs was a very grave responsibility. They were getting no rest either day or night, If so much damage had been done around the pit bottom, what was the damage likely to be nearer the seat of the explosion wherever it had occurred? What to do first and how to set about the job? All this needed a lot of discussion and a decision was not easily arrived at. One thing only was certain they had decided to reopen the pit, and the work must go on until something definite had been done.

The analysis of the atmosphere assured the authorities that the fire which had been seen on 22nd September had, through lack of oxygen supply, died out. Thus the seals on the pit had achieved. Well the rescue teams must continue and we are again organised into shifts to carry on with the work of exploration and finding suitable places to erect stoppings in the 'Dennis Intake' and return airways thereby making doubly sure that we stop still longer the supply of oxygen to the seat of the first explosion. The work on the first day was as nothing compared with what was to follow and done by the Rescue Men in the further exploration the disastrous pit. No man ever dreamed of so much damage. No man had ever seen such a calamity in any mine in the whole world. There was nothing for hundreds of yards around the pit bottom that was not wrecked. Upheavals in the floor, falls of roof girders, tubs, rails, and timber everything and every kind of material was blown and twisted all shapes. Every move had to be done with the utmost care. Not only had we to face the poisonous gas, but we had the possibility of further falls to look out for. May be in crawling past some fall or twisted girders there was always the possibility that one might knock off the nose clip or catch the air pipes and pull them, off the equipment. The first 4 weeks of the reopening 5 teams were engaged on the work, and after this time it was decided to reduce the number to 4 teams. Three to be down the pit and one team in the airlock as banksmen, and loading material required below.

An attempt was made to get from the bottom of the 'Martin Pit' to the bottom of the 'Dennis Pit', but at first this attempt failed owing to the heaped up material which had been thrown together by the explosions. The teams had to go through water, waist deep to get to the roads, where the stoppings had to be put in. Really I don't know how we all stood the strain. Considering the heat and the water, it was perfectly wonderful, the spirit of endurance shown by every man. Personally, I did not credit myself that I could take such a gruelling. But even in all this, there was always some little humour. Particularly so when we had the Ministry of Mines Doctor in the Company. One thought so little of the work when listening to his jokes, but for all his jesting, I suppose he did it for a purpose and knew it was better than his medicine as a nerve smoother. He was quite a genuine chap was our Doc. Always ready with some good advice. many others were similar.

One good lady of Gresford in particular was always waiting in the cabin at the surface, awaiting our return from below, and she always had a good big basket of food, chocolates and cigarettes and she was doing this daily for three months. Later she had to cut the food out of her benefactions, as the Colliery Company wished to make themselves responsible for this part. I will

not comment on the change but thank the Company for their efforts. The good lady was not going to be put off like this and if she couldn't bring sandwiches along she came with other for more delectable delicacies and the current newspapers. The Vicar of Gresford was also a daily visitor and he had to bring along his quota of chocolates and gigs.

Everyone connected with the work seemed to be determined to keep our minds off the work we were doing the time we were 'standing by' in the cabin. The Press reporters had photos to show us, they had taken for their respective papers. I am sure that each of the Rescue Men had enough photos of himself to paper the living room with and at this juncture I would like to pay a compliment to the Gresford Teams of Rescue Men for their jovial and friendly ways and the way they acted to those from other collieries. Whenever we were in the need of anything wanted help to carry out our work they were always willing. It was a big help to a strange team to have knowledge of roadways and roof conditions prior to the explosion. Whatever we had occasion to ask for, that thing was immediately given to us. Doors and bridges also air crossings as marked on the plan no longer existed.

STOPPING "F" IN THE "DENNIS DIP"

The first stopping to be built was the one so reported in the Press. Stopping 'F' to be built just inbye of the 'slant' in the 'Dennis Deep'. It was a three block stopping, wood blocks 3ft long and 1ft square being used. Each block weighed about 25 lbs. and about 800 would be needed as the roadway at this point was 18 ft high and 13 ft wide and to get these blocks of wood meant that we had to carry them 300 yards. This would prove a very slow job and it was decided to clear a road, lay rails and transport the blocks on flat trolleys part of the way and an aerial rope was fixed up and the blocks slung on chains to this rope. This was indeed a considerable help. The Pressmen were reporting day after day "Rescue Men Build Stopping Off". it had many other names before it was finished. Each team had only two hours supply of oxygen, and they must do their work and get back to the surface before the time expired, and after going down, and receiving the trolley of blocks to take it along the aerial rope, unload and put each block on the aerial, put each block in position on the stopping and allow time to come back to the surface, we found that our two hours were up.

If any team was a few seconds overdue the responsible people on the surface were in a bad way. They were wondering if something had happened and one does not wonder when it is considered that various species of insects and birds, in fact all manner of creatures that could walk, crawl or jump, had been tried in the airlock to see how long they would live in the atmosphere.

I remember one Doctor who brought a rat into the airlock (he of course was wearing apparatus). He was anxious to know how long the rat would exist, but before he could turn his wrist to look at his watch, the poor old rat had "gone west". One gentleman remarked that it was probably half dead when it was taken into the airlock, so it was decided to get a special sewer rat, one that was used to foul and poisonous gases. Give this one his due, he survived 10 seconds and he was 'gone'. A saucerful of all kinds of crawlers was next tried, but they were all dead before they had been on the job a second. Strange to relate the small 'ladybird' was the best of them all. She walked about for 6 hours before she gave up the ghost. Wood lice seemed to thrive in the atmosphere, but the Black beetle showed his legs instantly.

Now if all these creatures were dying in such a short time what of the team who were working 1100 yards from the airlock? If the least thing went wrong with the apparatus what chance had they? There was no back door here. No wonder the officials were anxious if a team was late getting back to the surface.

To get to the stopping, every piece that was put on had to be 'solid' every joint 'crossed' and levelled up with sand. The work was so slow that it became notorious, and I am sure the public were tired of reading about the building of 'F' stopping. However, the thing that matters most is that the responsible people were satisfied that the job was being made a good one. Many days were spent before it completed, and many of us were most anxious to get on to other work, and other parts of the pit. The spark of curiosity was being kindled and although there was nothing but wreckage, we wanted to see how other parts were affected.

Although going to the same place of work day after day, the authorities on the surface were most anxious and worried for our safety. Every hour, day, every minute was counted, and valued whilst we were down below.

Our task and danger was exactly the same. No man of the team was likely to forget where he was, and everything was going along smoothly and successfully. Teams were working hand in hand. No spirit of competition. The work handed over to the next team. a true report of what was needed next, and how the job was left. All this helped the work on considerably. Good comradeship and fellowship is essential on this kind of work. However one might neglect this spirit in ordinary daily life. It was only the spirit, and that alone which enabled us to reopen the Gresford Colliery. I am proud to say that the same spirit prevailed until we finished. It was left in the hands of the teams to carry the work through. It was out of the question for this work to be delegated to others, so we needed harmony, and the true spirit of fellowship.

Many and varied were the digressions when we were 'standing by'. On one occasion I asked a prominent Director of the Colliery Company if he could tell us the winner of the Lincoln Handicap. He replied that if he knew the winner of the Lincoln Handicap we could have Gresford Colliery, but I pointed out to him that we as the Rescue Men thought that the Colliery already belonged to us as nobody else seemed to want to go down the pit. To this he smilingly agreed, but I don't think any of us would accept it as a gift. Indeed I know that I personally would not. There was always a good joke going and these repaid us for the continued monotony down below. So many different personalities visited us, listening to our experiences and the 'waiting period' simply flew on wings. It was time for the working team to come back almost before one thought they had gone down. Our turn next, and although the time seemed to be short, that 'waiting period' was always worse than the actual 'getting down' to it. Most of us were only colliers and it was an honour to be in the company of such eminent people. Medical Men, Research Doctors, University Professors, Chief Inspector of Mines, Senior and Junior Inspectors, Representatives of the Owners, Mining Engineers, Rescue Station Superintendent and also our own local celebrities, the Vicar of Gresford, and the lady of the land whom I mentioned previously. Mother of all indeed, the Ruth of old. We have never heard of such a lady and all round sport always a perfect Christian who lives up to her profession. Let us not forget the Pressmen, and a lot of chaps, but don't let them hear too much.

All these people had something new to tell us each and every day, all were from different parts of the Country. All had different occupations and modes of living. It was highly educating to us to listen to some very interesting discussions, some of the becoming very heated at times. Each man upholding his own country, or defending his own profession. But when all their high standings and

professions had been taken into consideration, they had to admit that we lowly Rescue Men, held the key of success on this particular occasion. We were supreme at this period and at this class of work, and they all had to bow to us, as we now have to do to them now we have returned back to normal life and occupation. This world is not to be a selfish world or a one man's property. It proves to us that each and every one is dependent on the other. It matters not what position a person may hold, he is at all times dependent on someone else. It is a great pity that people do not realise this, it would be better for all classes.

All this of course is not building 'F' stopping. Day after day. Team after team. The same old work on the same old stopping. If other stoppings were to take so long, what were the chances of ever opening Gresford Colliery? But this was the main one, and the largest. It was down this road that the fire was actually seen, and we know that even now, by the samples of air taken from behind the stopping, that there is still 'heating' and the importance making it as near airtight as possible. The work progressed well up to the last foot to be built, here all shapes of blocks were required, and wedges to tighten up. Every team knew that it was useless to attempt any 'scamped' work and that last foot took as long to complete as the whole remainder of the stopping had done. One good thing about the work, no one was hurrying the job on, and after completion and fresh air was put into the pit the Mining Engineers, Inspectors, and all concerned, had a word of praise on the way the work had been done. All were agreed, that the work could not have been done better even in daylight and fresh air if the stopping had been built on the surface and by men not encumbered by the apparatus.

I am not flattered or giving undue praise, when I say that those higher officials, Inspectors and Agents, who accompanied the teams did exceptionally well. Many of them were not accustomed to heavy manual labour, but they would take any position as allotted by the Captain on the Team. Haulage, carrying blocks or building made no difference to them and they worked side by side, and took their turn at the heavy work, like other members of the Team. We marvelled at their fitness and capabilities, I thought some of them had never caught hold of a hammer or shovel. They surprised us all. Each Team looked forward to these people coming down with us. It meant a man extra in the Team. As a rule there was an Inspector of Mines with each Team. These changed around to avoid being the last down the shaft. If ever such work is necessary again, I am sure Teams will ask the Mines Department for those same Inspectors. Occasionally after the fresh air had been put into the pit, we had other visitors accompanying us down. They were sightseers, some for experience which we hope they will ever need. At this time Gresford must have been the Buxton Research Station. Every day eminent Professors were moving to and fro with the paraphernalia. During the opening period, I think every Country that was connected with Mining and Research work was represented and later Mr. Ernest Brown, the Minister of Mines came along to see for himself the work that had been done.

Stopping 'F' was completed on the 28th April and we were pleased to be moving on to the next, stopping 'E' which was to be erected in the 'slant'. This was not considered to be near so important as the previous one, and it was decided that three thicknesses of brattice cloth across a framework would suffice, and this only took two shifts to complete. Next one, stopping 'H', was to be put in the 'Dennis Return Airway', but we had other tasks.

Occasionally we would accompany the Research Doctor from Birmingham University who would want a few samples of the air in the pit from various places. It was a treat for any Team to accompany him, and if because he had the apparatus on, he could not speak his motions were equally as humorous and we were taught how to take and bottle the little samples of air and the

direction of the ventilation. He was quite a hefty chap, about 16 stone in weight, so he could not overrun us, we were always 'top dogs' as he had so much more to carry, and many times he was glad of a halt in the journey. I remember that on one occasion we had to take down a hand pump with 100 yards of hose for delivering the water from the 'sump' into the low side. This was water which, in the first occasion down, had stopped the cage from entering the sump. As I said we took the pump and the suction pipes consisting of two large lengths coupled together with a clamp. We fitted the pump as near to the shaft side as the suction pipe would allow, and the Doctor thought to make himself generally useful, put his sample tackle on the side, and begins to couple the hose to the pump. Then throws the (as he thought) securely coupled lengths of suction hose into the water ready to start pumping. Every man worked in turn his hardest to get the water delivering. No good. Examine the valves of the pump. Still no water. Blame the engineers who have sent the pump down. Try again. No good. Hold on a minute. Why, there is no wonder we have not pumped any water, there is only two feet of suction pipe. Not near the water, and the remainder of the pipe is floating about in the sump uncoupled from the pump. One hour wasted. What is to be done? We must go to the surface and procure another length to couple up to the suction side, but we were careful to tell them on the surface, that the piece we had taken down was not long enough to reach the water. You can imagine the puzzled look on their faces. They probably thought we had put the pump where it was intended to deliver water. Our Doc, was never forgiven for throwing the suction pipe into the sump and the joke was always revived when we were sure no one directly connected was listening.

Stopping 'H' was being built in a place easy of access, only 100 yards from the 'Martin Pit Bottom' along the 'Main Martin Return'. This was to be built similar to 'F' stopping i.e. blocks of wood. by this time every man was so accustomed to his apparatus that everything was much easier. only listening the valves click watching the pressure gauges, making sure that every man had a sufficient supply of oxygen, and this stopping much smaller of course the 'F' was put up in tree days, It had previously been decided that seven stoppings would be necessary, but after reconsidering, the Mining Engineers were of the opinion that some would be unnecessary for the time being at last, and so we were put on to build 'D' stopping of sand bags.

This proved to be very hard work. We had up until now only had to transport the material to the 'dip', but for 'D' we had to go to the other side of the pit, to the 'Rise', and the whole way we were travelling up to the knees in 'slurry' and grease. A trolley was being used to load the bags of sand, some pulling the trolley by means of a piece of rope, others pushing behind. 500 bags of sand were needed. How pleased we were when the last bag was put on.

This completed all the stoppings around the pit bottom, and after a careful inspection by Agent, Inspectors and Rescue Teams of all other stoppings it was found that all were doing the work expected of them, and the second stage of the recovery could be considered with a practical possibility of success.

"SEAL TAKEN OFF DENNIS PIT"

By taking the seal off the 'Dennis Pit' and dismantling the airlock at the top of the 'Martin Pit' natural ventilation would be set up and make it possible for those persons, not trained in the use of the apparatus to enter the pit. Those high officials who had waited day after day on surface listened to the reports of progress made, curbed their impatience week after week. These could now go and see for themselves the work that had to be done to make it possible for them to go

down. Separating doors in the roads between the two pits in the pit bottom were opened wide, and men who had done no work for 7 months were busily digging the sand seal off the top of the 'Dennis' shaft. Removing boards, girders and other material. The foul air being liberated from the pit was like dense black smoke. It was found later that the latter explosion (after the seals had been put on) had dislodged two girders forming the seal, and these had fallen down the pit doing damage to the extent that no one knew at present, but all could conjecture.

This was a very anxious time for all concerned. If the stoppings erected were not airtight some more oxygen would feed through on to what? If the fire was still smouldering, there was a possibility that the whole lot would be set away again, but, as has been proved those stoppings were good and held put the necessary oxygen. A task had been accomplished by the Mining Engineers, Inspectors, Research Doctors and Rescue Men. Something unique in the Mining World. The only pit ever opened after sealing by Rescue men working in an irrespirable atmosphere.

Great credit was due to the manufacturers of the 'Proto' apparatus Messrs. Siebe Gorman of London. Their representative was present during the whole time seeing that all the apparatus was kept up to standard and generally given sound advice on the care and use of their equipment.

It was the 8th. April when after a most careful examination of all the stoppings, the men wearing 'Proto' apparatus returned to the surface, and the seal was taken off the 'Dennis Pit'. All the Heads of Departments, Chief and Divisional Inspectors, Superintendent of the Recovery Work, Mr Abbott, Mining Engineers and Directors of the Colliery all were able to go and look round the area up to the various stoppings. I am sure that a moment of consideration on that first trip round of theirs, would convince them that there had been no exaggeration in the reports by the captains of the Rescue Teams. To say the least they were amazed at the damage and far worse than they had expected. Not only the force of the latter explosions, but the fact that 25,000 gallons of water per minute had been pouring down the shaft for 7 months and everyone knows the effect of water in a pit. The floor is lifted up until the roadways are not even half the size that they were originally. Everyone knows equally the effect water had when put on lime. How the lime will crumble to a powder, and the water had a similar effect on the limestone that formed the strata. Destruction everywhere, played by two agents, 'Explosion' and 'Water'. It is difficult to imagine what were the thoughts of those gentlemen who were the Directors of the Colliery. Their thoughts must have run on these lines. Can any sort of order be restored out of this kind of chaos? Will ever we be able to get any more coal along these roadways? On one thing I feel sure, that the gentleman who had previously been asked for the winner of the 'Lincoln' and had replied that if he had known he would give us the Gresford Pit, I am sure that on looking round he must have wished that he had known the Lincoln winner, and so got rid of what seemed an impossible commercial proposition, a coal pit which looked and was a shambles.

The reporters of the Press were allowed to accompany the Officials down the pit and many were the photographs which were taken, one I believe of which now hangs in the Ministry of Mines Offices. It is one of a place that was known as the 'Big Junction' where coal tubs had been piled one on top of the other in endless confusion and on one of the tubs was written in chalk:-

*"SAME WAY BACK
CAN'T GET THIS WAY
PARRY DAVIES - CAPT. 11.3.35."*

and on this message hangs a tale that I think I had better relate.

It would appear that on his first visit down the pit after taking off the seals, the Chief Inspector of Mines, Sir Henry Walker had seen this message, and I was sent for to appear at the General Offices and told that they considered that I had accomplished an impossible feat in climbing up these tubs with the equipment on, as they themselves had tried and failed. "How on earth did you get the team there?" was their query. The thoughts running through my mind was that I was in for a 'slating', a real good 'telling off'. But no. After the explanation which after all was very simple, everything was all right. I explained, that with the Agent, Mr Charlton, accompanying, the Team had waded through water which came up to our waists. The Agent and myself intended going a few yards further to see if we could get measurements for another stopping. As Captain, and not being able to speak to the Team, this was the way I conveyed to them my intentions. That was, to return the same way, and they being fully trained men knew that I intended them to remain there until the Agent and myself got back to those piled tubs. The Chief Inspector made it pretty clear to me that had he have known that the Teams were taking these additional risks, he would not have let the Teams go down the mine. Each Team was doing the same. Taking risks. Indeed, what was the whole job, but one huge risk? Each team went down to find out exactly what was the position, so that an accurate report could be given. Who would have dreamed that photographers would be allowed down the pit and so be able to put on record out transgressions of 'Safety First'. No doubt the other teams committed similar acts, only they were either 'lucky' or 'unlucky' whichever way the question is looked at.

Let me here record, that we all did a good deal 'off our own bat' some jobs that those in authority could not possibly have instructed us on. We also did one or two jobs on instructions and, dare I say it, regretted it afterwards, and were ready to throw the tools at each other afterwards. I remember on one of the occasions we were told to take two of the four cover plates off the top of the cage, so that the team following us could go down and do some repairs to the scaffolding in the shaft bottom. The cage we were to operate on was brought to the pit top and we took into the airlock sledge hammers, sets, cold chisels, etc. to beak off the heads of the bolts holding these two plates in position. Now swinging a sledge is a man's job, even with 40 lbs. of equipment and in an atmosphere which is irrespirable and we had worked like 'niggers' for the first hour and had 'knocked off' only 12 of the 40 bolt heads. Each member of the team was getting done up, and tired and progress seemed definitely slow. We were carrying out the instructions of the 'heads' which had been very particular, even to showing us how to hold the 'set' on the bolt head, and if progress is slow then they will have to put up with it.

All the time we could be observed through a glass window in the airlock, and now and again, one or other of the authorities came to the window to see how we were going on. Slow? I should say we were, and not by any stretch of the imagination could we be expected to go faster as our two hours neared the end. Just then a stranger to us, beckoned of me to go outside the airlock. He told me, that the two plates were held by two clips and that if they were loosened, the plates would lift off the top of the cage. Back I went on to the job, and sure enough, there were two clips and in two minutes we had the plates off, and we had done the job that every man of the team had been hammering his brains out for more than an hour. Still we had been busy carrying the instructions and had never dreamed of doing any other, or that those two plates were fixed different from the other two.

This never happened again, we always looked over the job ourselves after this, and the easiest was our way in the future. We found on several occasions, that if we had carried out our instructions of

how to do the job, we would have worked hard and accomplished nothing. This is where a good Captain is important. It will be realised by that conversation is impossible and therefore, there is no 'discussion' down below, on the best way to do a job. The Captain will convey to the men what he wants them to do, by motions or writing, to tackle the job in the way he thinks, and he holds firm to that way. If he does not, then each individual member of the Team adopts his own methods, each one different, and the team finishes with the job partly done, and badly at that.

I don't suppose any Captain had trouble in this respect. All men knew that the captain was responsible, and the way, any particular job was done did not concern them.

By this time there were 400 men employed clearing the debris and relaying the rails. These men were able to work without apparatus, as the air was quite fresh in all roads up to the stoppings after unsealing of the pits. These men were thoroughly skilled in the repair of the roadways, and the timbering of same, and let me add they were quite anxious to get back 'into collar' again after 7 months of walking the streets. Not them for the 'Dole' any longer than they could help.

The Rescue Men wearing their gear were to advance through stopping 'H' after a new airlock had been built. The airlock to be made of two doors properly bricked in the roadway directly in front of stopping 'H' and in fresh air. When a Team passed through the first door and closed it, the second could then be opened and the Team were again in the 'danger zone'. Rails had to be advanced and 'bars' set in the roof for support, and falls to clear. We advanced along the 'Martin Return Airway', 300 yards in this manner, and to a point where it was considered the second advance should be stopped and the ground 'won' consolidated. Framework erected and 'brattice cloth' covering, was sufficient for this and when completed the number of workmen could be increased to clear up the mess. Next stopping was one in advance of the big stopping 'F' on the 'Dennis Dip'. This was also to be of brattice cloth stopping. Of course only temporary as the first ones had not been taken down yet. Stoppings were also put up the 'slit' from the 'Martin Road' and the little 'slant' also on '20's Road', the last where we knew that one of the first rescue teams was still laying. However the stopping was erected 200 yards from where the body lay. On the little 'slant' a heavy sandbag stopped was built, and by means of these various stoppings and the airlock we have moved 300 yards down the 'Dennis Deep' and not had to alter or make a road through the big stopping 'F' and we can travel by way of the 'Martin Return' and out back on the 'Dennis Deep Road'.

What of all that water which had gone down the pit? We could see no travel of water here. It had all been absorbed by dry strata. All of it seemed to have gone down by way of 'headings'.

The conditions of the 'Dennis Deep' along the distance we had travelled was exactly in the same condition as when we left it on the 23rd September 1934. There was very little change, and it would appear that those later explosions had not touched the area where the first explosion had happened, and that the other districts in the pit were the ones to suffer in the later explosions.

I have read and heard broadcasts on the wireless that the bodies of the victims would be left submerged in the water that had gone down the pit during those seven months. It is a great mistake that such statements should be made. Nobody can say that this is the case for certain. If any man could find water for the 250 yards we advanced down the 'Dennis Deep', I would think it and that would surely put an end to me. Not only is the statement conjecture, but what of the harm such a statement would make on the relatives? What would the poor relatives think? It is enough to know that their loved ones are still down that fateful pit, without the added horror that they are floating up and down the district. None are in the position to know as much as the Rescue

Men and none of the believe that the water is near those bodies. In fact I will go as far as to say that emphatically I do not believe there is any water in that particular part. The theory of the man making the statement is wrong, and his calculations are a long way out, and to announce this as his opinion, is disastrous. We of the Rescue Teams claim to know all the facts that we have ascertained of the conditions down the Gresford Colliery Some facts that are of no importance to others than in the mining world, and if revealed would only be added injury to those poor mothers' feelings. We have lodged those particular things in our own memories and need not divulge them to any person. If they were of any benefit, either to prevent similar explosions in the future, or to give a clue to the cause of this one, then of course they would have to be given. It is of no use to surmise that so and so happened, and I propose to leave to a later time this matter. By then probably other such silly ideas will have been broadcast..

On 2nd May all stoppings were again completed and we were ready to advance a further 300 yards, All the original stoppings were to be taken down and those just erected were to do the same duty, that of holding the fresh air on one side and the gas on the other.

Suddenly and without any warning a halt was called. All recovery work is suspended until the 'Dennis Shaft' which suffered in the later explosions, was made safe, so that in case of accident to the 'Martin Shaft' or winding engines, there would be a second means of egress out of the pit. The Authorities considered that the of only one pit had been taken too long, hence their decision to suspend operations. We were told that we should be wanted back there in a week's time to further advance the stoppings, to get to the bodies and if possible to find the cause of the original explosion. we were informed that on the Tuesday following the Jubilee celebrations we should be again going forward. None of us wanted it, but we had stood up to the work up to this time and it was up to us to go ahead to find the cause and if possible to get those bodies. What has happened we do not know. For some reason or other the Rescue Operations have been suspended and we do not start after the Jubilee celebrations. Was all hope of recovery of those bodies abandoned? Why such a change of plan? Surely the least they could have done was to tell us that no further attempt was to be made to reach those bodies. We were told nothing and of course were constantly expecting the call to come to restart the recovery operations.

NIGHT VISIT TO THE DEAD RESCUE MAN

I was still left wondering when the Rescue Operations would be restarted when on a certain evening at 6 p.m.. a call came to my house with the instructions to proceed to Gresford Colliery, and report at 9.30pm. The messenger did not know what for, and I was left to think what may be the reason. I accordingly went along and reported to the Agent. He informed me that the Inspectors intended to try to get to the body of the Rescue Man who had been left in the 'Return Airway' on September 22nd. 1934. I was to be Captain of the Team made up of two Inspectors and the Ministry of Mines Doctor. I had to look round the pit top to find any old clothes I could to change into, and then downed the old No.13 apparatus, seeing that every one's equipment was in order we proceeded to the 'Dennis Pit', taking stretcher, brattice cloth and other necessities. Everything had been kept a dead secret to avoid any crowd of sightseers or photographers. This was the first time I had gone down the 'Dennis Pit' since 23rd. September and I was astonished at the change which had taken place and the extent of the damage done. If anything it was worse than the 'Martin Pit'. In fact the water, after being turned to the Dennis Pit had done more damage. There was 4 feet of a 'dinting' being taken up from the cage in the pit bottom where the water lifted the floor. However, it is no use bothering the reader with these details. We had a job

on hand, and as the only person in the Team who was aware of the position of the body, and it will be remembered I had seen the lamp shining down the road when on the 22nd. September we had fetched the other dead Rescue Man out. This apparently was the reason I had been sent for to accompany the Doctor and Inspectors. We proceeded to '20's Airway' and coupled up our apparatus in exactly the same place we had done the same thing on September 22nd. Our feelings were not the same on this occasion. We knew now that we were going in to fetch one who was past human aid, and we had no anxiety that there may be someone alive down there.

The roadway had stood wonderfully well. One or two small falls here and there and the floor lifted a little with the water running down. These made it difficult to get along. Measurements of the roadway were taken, loose stones pulled down and falls levelled as best we could.

We reached the body and the Doctor made an examination taking myself as a witness, In appearance the condition of the body was none the worse. Not a stone had fallen near it, He lay with his arm under his head and face downwards. Often the question is asked "What state would the bodies be in after three months down the pit?". I can truthfully say, that I would have been able to identify his body even if I had not known he was there. I had, as a boy, attended the same school, and later we worked together in the pit. His features, his hands were without a blemish and very little decomposition had taken place. We did not move the body It had taken us an hour to get there and make the examination, and it was too great a risk that we should bring him back now, in view of the short time at our disposal and the fact that there were those two small falls to level.

This was the second time I had been compelled to leave a comrade where he had given his life in attempting to save others. Although I had to give the decision to leave him for the present. As Captain of that Team I am proud of that decision and I knew that the chances would be greater after the road had further been cleared. The Inspectors and the Doctor were good and fully trained in the use of the apparatus, but there was hard and heavy work to be done to get the body to the surface. Our time was limited and I could see that the supply of oxygen was not likely to last out. the road was rough and stony and my knees, through crawling along, were very sore, and I expect those of my team mates were in a worse plight as, of course, they were not accustomed to this kind of travelling. They were all agreed that it was better to have the road repaired and levelled at the earliest possible moment. It was the first time in my life that I had to work with Mines Inspectors or at least have them working for me, and the highest tribute that could be given I would give to them for that night's work. They worked under the Captaincy of their inferior in ordinary pit life and they gladly submitted to every instruction given to them. The Doctor, as I have said earlier was the life and soul of my party. First he would grouse, next he would praise, and finally he would groan. He kept this Special Team in good spirits on the homeward journey, till I felt his knees giving in to all the torture they had been subjected to, by his crawling over those sharp stones. The temperature in the return was 100°F, and all this, coupled with the size of the Doctor, gave him something to think about. The perspiration was pouring from him and I didn't think he could have a dry switch of clothing on him. I guess he was pleased to get back into fresh air.

If we attempted to carry out that body on that occasion what would have become of the Doctor? He could have been no help with all the bruises and sore knees, and I could see we should require every little bit of help possible. Hence my decision to leave the body on that occasion with the view of a nearly recovery. We returned to the surface somewhat disappointed, but on the whole, satisfied. We had seen the body, and knew that it was in a good state and that neither falls of roof

or the water that had gone past him had decomposed the body.

On the following Saturday, my original complete Team was summoned to the Colliery to go in and this time bring the body back. All other Rescue Teams 'standing by' in case of need. Again the whole operation was kept secret. At 9.30 p.m. after the usual examination of men and equipment we went down. A team of 5 accompanied by the Doctor and two Inspectors and the Agent of the Colliery. The apparatus was not needed on this occasion, as fresh air had been taken in the meantime forced down the airway. Some distance down, we took off the apparatus and proceeded to the body. Oh what a change. Something had happened. The Doctor again making an examination found that one arm and one leg was broken. A big stone had fallen since our previous visit to the body and had disturbed the remains. What a pity, I felt it more because I had seen the corpse perfect and felt guilty because I had decided to leave him there only the previous Thursday. It was unfortunate that had happened and there is no doubt that the fresh air, being turned down that airway, had caused the disturbance in the roof and the quick decomposition of the body. The Team was most anxious to get away from there before any further fall came, and the Doctor carefully wrapped the body in cloth after stones had been lifted from it and the Doctor removed the apparatus which was required to be tested. We carried the body out on a stretcher. After eight long months of waiting for an opportunity to get our fellow Rescue Man out of the bowels of the earth. The Team had felt it was an insult and a mark on the reputation of all Rescue Workers to have surrendered to any conditions, and leave a comrade buried in the unknown grave. We all felt that whatever state he is in, we must know that he is buried in a proper grave, so that we can go along and pay our deepest respects. He is now buried in Gwersyllt Cemetery and his funeral was one of the largest ever witnessed at that burial ground, All classes, all professions, the highest and the lowest in the district attended and paid a last tribute to our fellow comrade. What more could a man have done than to sacrifice his life in attempting to save others? He was the last of three rescue men who lost their lives to be recovered. All three had died heroes and their names will never be forgotten in the Mining World, we raise out hats to their memory.

To their Captain, the same applies. He was the only man of that Team who went into the Airway and came out alive. He is living and working today. By a mere thread was his life saved. He was helped from the pit in an exhausted condition. I saw him that morning, his eyes appearing to be coming out of his head and practically helpless. He had struggled with each on of these mates, trying to pull them back to fresh air and he exhausted himself. Only 20 more yards and he knows there is a chance of life but the struggle is too much and he has to leave them one by one, and he himself staggers back into fresh air. His unselfish attempt to save his mates whilst endangering his own life is worthy of the highest recognition.

BUNKUM AND BRAVADO

In giving this story of the Rescue Operations at Gresford, I have given the truth which I challenge anyone to refute. There were several reports given to the Press which were sheer bravado and bunkum. One report given by one man, how he had burnt his shoes in the fire at '29's Junction' on Sunday 23rd. September. Well, he must have taken them off and thrown them into the fire. The rescue Teams were the furthest advanced and nearest the fire and none of us burnt our shoes, or even singed our clothes. Anyone who bunt themselves did it purposely.

Later opinions are expounded that the victims died of starvation. A statement that is certainly without foundation. The same person gave it out publicly that his opinion was based on the fact

that he believed they died of starvation because their lamps were lit. Is he not aware that lamps will burn in CO and that less than 1% of CO is fatal to life? Personally, I don't attach much importance to what was said by those men who were fortunate to escape. Their report of seeing 70 men following them out. How far? Isn't it too much to expect them to know much of those who are following behind, when their own life was in jeopardy? It had often been said that there are 70 men in the airway near the 'clutch'. I cannot at the moment contradict this, but I have my doubts. We were told that if the teams get down to '29's Junction' on Sunday 23rd. September that there will be 100 bodies there. We got there all right but no bodies were found and we will have to wait and see if the other report is correct of 70 men near the 'clutch' in that 'Return Airway'. There are lots of reports I could mention, but seeing that one can not prove or deny, and that operations are indefinitely held up, why not let them stand over till, if ever, they are proved or disproved.

A PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO ALL MY MATES

In conclusion, I feel that I must congratulate all the Rescue Men for their splendid work during the recovery operations. All Teams were one dependant and the other and all worked just as one unit. The majority of the Gresford Teams were new hands, and had been trained especially after the explosion. Each of them was equal to the best, even those who had 22 years of rescue work and training.

Common sense is needed on this kind of work. 'Brain not Brawn'. This is not a job where one can rush in. A physically fit man with common sense and that necessary 'pit sense' and 'pit knowledge'.

None of us are brave men, but we claim to have sufficient confidence in the apparatus and being accustomed to pit work, fear does not enter our minds.

Of the Mines Inspectors, I never did care much for. They always seemed to know all and the Deputy or Workman nothing, but since my contact with them on this occasion I have entirely changed my opinion or should I say they changed it for me? They are a jolly good lot of chaps, particularly the two who constantly worked side by side with the Teams. One from Stoke and the other from Doncaster. Neither in nor out of the pit did they differ from us. They were mixing with us constantly, and if they enjoyed our company, so did we enjoy theirs. We look forward to our next meeting, not we hope under the same circumstances, and the same kind of work. The Chief Inspector, Sir Henry Walker, always had a word of encouragement for the Teams. It built and cemented that confidence in him. We knew that nothing could go wrong if we followed his advice.

A word or two on the reports made at the time of the remuneration of the Rescue Men. The reports were varied and many of them that we were paid #10 per week. Let me tell my readers that the Rescue Men at the explosion were not paid at all. No man asked what the rate of pay was. The question of payment at a time like this does not enter the minds of men, but at Christmas 1934 the owners of Gresford gave a gratuity to all those volunteers who went down the pit on September 22nd and 23rd. Each man received the same amount which was generous, at the same time pointing out that the services rendered could not be reckoned in money.

The payment for the recovery work never reached anything like £10 per week. It was an agreed rate which taken on an average did not exceed £5 per week. I can safely leave it to my readers to judge the work and the pay. If every man engaged in the recovery was granted a pension of that sum per week for the remainder of his life, he would not be imposing or robbing the Exchequer if

only one looks at the question from the saving of the unemployment pay. Nearly £600 per week is saved in this way since it was made possible to reopen the part of the pit and the figure will be increased to £1,000 as soon as they can re-employ men. Nor is this the most important. If we had the opportunity to advance and find the cause of the explosion to possibly prevent a similar happening. What would then have been the value of our work? and what value is placed on our present experiences by the Research Committee? The whole of the Mining Industry has benefited by the unique experience of opening up Gresford.

We are often asked for our opinion whether the bodies could be got out. We have all discussed the matter and personally I say that those that could be got out should. We have heard all the argument that is only sentiment, but the people who use this as an argument have no one belonging to them down the pit, and what is sentiment? Take sentiment from the human being and you place it with the animals. I say I should want mine out if I had one there and I should want the opportunity of visiting his last resting place. If there is nothing more than sentiment in having a proper funeral and a proper grave, why waste ground and go the expense of a coffin? Why not make a big hole and bury the dead in a heap?. Why take the Nobility to the Abbey? There is something more than sentiment. There is something in the inner man that appeals to all Christians and appeals to me.

The authorities must have had a good reason for not going forward to get those bodies out of which I don't know, but I have always had that assurance that whatever could be done for the sake of the bereaved and for the safety of their future. They would always do. The Ministry of Mines in co-operation with all other officials in these I place my confidence and consider that they are in a position to know what is best.

THE INQUIRY

This did not in the least appeal to me. The fact that each side was collecting evidence to fight with each other was not to my mind that which was wanted. On many occasions there was hilarity and applause, and none of this brought light on anything material. Trying to better each other in the argument and not getting any nearer the cause, or the things that mattered. I did not have the opportunity (which I regret) of attending any of the sittings of the Inquiry but I followed through the Press reports every days proceedings.

The public must have got tired of the whole question. Silly questions were asked and silly answers given, just to try to make fools of each other. It is to be regretted that this was so especially when one considers the gravity of the question. The public had a detailed account of the proceedings and so I didn't propose to go any further into them. A later one is to be held and I shall have the opportunity of expressing an opinion at that one. I will say here and now that no person, whatever his position will get any answer from me if I see he is trying to be smart at someone else's expense or if he is 'playing to the gallery'. His questions will have to be brief and to the point and no beating about the bush. The truth is required and nothing but the truth, and it will be no use him trying to wrangle something that is not there.

GENERALITIES

Touching back to the special instructions given to each Captain of the Recovery Teams, it will be

realised by readers of this that these were so detailed that if they were carefully attended to there could be no further mistakes with the consequent loss of further life. Just as long as the apparatus functioned the members of each team were in no danger, and I could never understand why there was always so much fuss. Why, there are always those Press reports of the 'Death Trap'. 'Rescue Men walking into 'Death'. Believe me there was no bravery in tackling such work. Every man had every confidence in the apparatus and after hearing the instructions read to him, there was no feeling of fear. Going into the Pit Yard to commence a day's operations was very much the same as going to our ordinary day's work but one must admit that after the day's operations were over one was feeling very much more tired than one usually does after ordinary work. Maybe the heat was responsible, or perhaps the continual breathing of oxygen. Anyway I never was inclined to have a good hearty meal after a day down Gresford, and certainly much less inclined for a walk. Work and bed, bed and work was the order of the day and never varied, Five days a week, which the Doctors agreed was as much as could be expected of us, and which they considered was the utmost limit we could do, even if the Authorities had wanted more. Continued medical examinations assured all concerned that every man who put on apparatus was as 'fit as a fiddle'. When one considers these factors, one will readily understand that the risk was very small indeed and of bravery none was needed.

One may think that the responsibilities of the Captain were heavy. Looked at from the ordinary point of view, there is no doubt they were, but when the quality of his Team Mates is considered, that they are in all respects, each one individually, equally as good as experienced a rescue man as the Captain then the responsibility is considerably reduced, all the work to be done was equally shared by all members of the team. Prior to the descent the job was always discussed and a settled policy adopted. There were times of course, when some unforeseen circumstances cropped up, then the Captain had to make a decision without the help of his mates if we happened to be below ground at the time. Loyal each member of the Team would assist the Captain to carry out the instructions given, and as the safety of each member depended first on himself, it was only natural that he always was anxious to preserve his life and look to his own safety. The question of the Captain reading the pressure gauges on the equipment every twenty minutes, one can readily understand that the person actually wearing the apparatus was also at his disposal at all times below ground.

In cases of the description of Gresford where no one could go below ground unless wearing equipment. One will readily understand, that by far the most important part of the Captain's duty is to make and write a report after again reaching surface which in all cases, was all the authorities had to work on and plan the forward moves which were to be made. A copy of each Captain's report was forwarded to the Ministry of Mines each day for reference. As was proved at Gresford, a good team makes a good Captain. I am sure that the other Captains will bear me out in this. Just as an example, I will quote an instance, when owing to the absence of the Captain of one of the Gresford Colliery Teams, I was given the charge for one of the descents of this team. Every man and of course, the quality of his work was to me an unknown quantity, but I found the same spirit prevailed in that Team just as it did in my own. The men were very loyal to me. Every man did his utmost and worked hand in hand with his mate and I did not have the least little fear with them as was the case with my own Team. There was a fine spirit of comradeship and brotherhood shown amongst them all, the kind of spirit you find very rarely amongst fellow workmen in everyday life. The standard of the morale of each man was splendid. I often think of them and wonder why it is necessary for such disasters to occur to bring out this spirit of comradeship. There is, in no industry I know of, any greater spirit of brotherly love than in the pits, but we have to wait until he is in distress before the spirit is manifest. Why? In my opinion, if that same spirit was shown in

everyday life, and put into operation before help was needed, I am firmly convinced that the accident rates in the pit would be very materially decreased. When everything is going all right the feeling is 'Get on with your job, I'll do mine' no thought for the other chap until he is fastened and then what a change of temperament. A stranger, to hear men talk to each other, would think there was no vestige of fellow feeling for each other, but let him see these men in danger., It would be his turn to 'have another think'. This, of course applies more or less but I would definitely say, less, in all walks of life and gives abundant room for thought for all people of a reformatory turn of mind.

TYPE OF RESCUE MAN

What kind of man is necessary for the task as undertaken at Gresford? My choice would be based on the following. His age would not matter to me at all providing the Doctors considered he was physically fit. A good practical 'pitman' preferably one that had some face experience. A good all-round man that can either 'collar' or 'notch' a piece of timber, and one who can adapt himself to any class of work usually met with in a pit. Rescue Teams must be made up of this type, as they never know what they are likely to encounter. Active men, both bodily and mentally. Quick to move and quicker to see and know what is needed. An example of this may be given. Two men are setting a 'bar' and a third man is looking on. A wedge is needed to tighten the bar in the roof and that third man should be on the lookout to see what kind of wedge is needed and what is more he should have it ready by the time it is needed. The men holding the 'bar' in position cannot tell him what they want and one can easily realise how exasperating it would be under those circumstances if the men did not know what was needed of him. All this means a lot to the other members of the a Team. He should be able to see what tools are required and if he happens to hand a saw up when a hammer is needed, he looks like receiving the saw back again faster than he handed it up. There were flaring cases of this kind of stupidity when as, on several occasions, we had some of those visitors down who were not conversant with the use of apparatus and who out of curiosity came down to see us work. They were always anxious to help us, and to do this more often than not handed up the wrong tool.

All this would annoy the best Rescue Man, particularly when one was at the utmost limit of endurance and getting towards the end of his two hours, and probably ready to let go anything he may be holding up. Other instances, when erecting a brattice cloth and were knocking in a nail into the timber to fasten it, the hammer not hitting the nail true. The nail would fly away, and of course you needed another nail, but Mr Curious would hand you a knife to cut the brattice cloth. You would, dear reader, come to the conclusion, as I did, that he was just an amateur home decorator and had not made the sort of success at the job. Just simply because he was not looking and seeing what was going on. Yes, the ideal man for Rescue Work must have the 'pit sense' which comes from experience, 'Coal Face' experience and also a knowledge of haulage. Age, I say again, would not matter providing the man was strong and able. It is absolutely necessary that he should be a steady intelligent worker, observant and quick to perceive and decide. If possible to, as the saying goes 'see through a brick wall'. No 'wait and see what comes' methods. Normally there is no time to wait and see. There is somebody's son, somebody's husband behind there and we must get to him if we can. Each man should be able to grasp the position himself and know what is required of him. He must not be dependent on other members of the Team. They have enough trouble to look after their own safety. Many and varied are the essential qualifications necessary to make good a good Rescue Man. Lastly I would say, and chiefly one where in cases of emergency such as these, one who is not likely to lose his head for by doing so he is very prone to panic the

rest of the tram and make them useless.

GRESFORD WORKING COAL

Now it is the early part of 1936 and 700 men are re-employed at Gresford, working and producing coal. The 'Dennis Area' where the entombed men lie is still sealed off. Visits have been made by the experts which still consider it unwise to break the seals and explore further. It is now hopeless in my opinion either to bring the bodies out or find the possible cause of the explosion. The roadways are undoubtedly closed up by this time with the falls of roof, and the floor lifting. It would be an utter impossibility for Rescue Men to travel these roads. Personally I do not see what purpose is served by the periodical visits of these experts. Past sorrowings are revived by those bereaved mothers and fathers and wives and it would be far better to console them with the blunt fact that their loved ones can never be recovered. This no doubt would be a hard blow at the time but I think even this hard blow would be better than the continual revival of hopes of their recovery.

There is no question that the Rescue Men are responsible for the fact that so far the pit has been able to re-employ all those 700 men. The business in Wrexham (the shopkeepers etc.) have had some of their trade restored to them by the work of the Rescue Teams. 700 unemployed have made their minds easy and are now off the 'Dole'. The owners of the Colliery have had some part of the pit restored to them by those same Rescue Men, and the experience may be of untold value in the Mining Industry in future cases of this description.

Now I have given the report of the disaster and the recovery of the Colliery I feel I must pay a compliment to the manufacturers of the equipment which made it possible for such work to be undertaken and the efficiency of the 'Proto' apparatus made by Messrs. Siebe Gorman of London speaks volumes for itself. Not once during the operations did the apparatus fail to function. Had it done so, there must have been further casualties. Confidence in this equipment was born in each worker of the teams and nothing occurred which caused him to lose that confidence.

The whole of the Rescue Men who took part in the operations of recovery were after the work was completed invited to London as guests of Messrs. Siebe Gorman and made up into two parties, 50 in all. Special saloons provided and arriving at Paddington Station we were met by Mr. Buswell, Siebe Gorman's representative and were conveyed by a private bus to our Hotel 'The Melbourne'. After a good lunch we had a stroll round and went to the Holborn Empire at night. The following day (Saturday) we were again met by Mr. Buswell at 10am. After a real good hearty breakfast and a round of the principle places of London was made, Horse Guards Parade and Whitehall included. At the arranged time we were conveyed to the 'Proto' works where we received a real fine reception from Sir R. Thomas the Chairman of the Directors of Messrs. Siebe Gorman together with three of his sons who work for the firm. Here was a real Royal lunch prepared and after this visit of inspection through the various departments of the works. I had always, during the connection of the Rescue Work, thought I was thoroughly convergent with all parts of the apparatus, but when I saw the various parts being made I had to admit that my knowledge was very scant indeed.

One of the interesting features was the fact that four of our party donned a diving suit and went into a tank of water 80 ft. deep and about 20 ft in diameter. A glass tank where you could see the men going down under the supervision of course of two experienced divers. That in itself was

worth the journey to London and later Mr. Buswell himself an experienced diver gave an exhibition with the diving suit and one that was thoroughly enjoyed by all of us. Back to more refreshment both liquid and solid anything one requires just call for it. Right Royally did Messrs. Siebe Gorman treat those Rescue Men who had pinned their faith in the apparatus at Gresford. afterwards we took leave of Sir R. Thomas and his employees and a future round of sightseeing at Hampton Court and many other places, and then the Palladium at the evening and after the show the bus was still there to convey us to the station for the homeward journey.

To give all the details of the trip to London would be telling tales out of school and I don't intend to do that but can place it on record that this treat was appreciated by all the Rescue Men and would point out to the fact that from leaving Wrexham to arriving back again there was no necessity for any member of the party to spend a penny piece of his own money. To Messrs. Siebe Gorman their employees and particularly Mr. Buswell we tender our sincere thanks and assure them we shall always cherish the group photograph and beautiful little disc which was presented to each member.

Previous to our trip to London, we had been the guests of the Welsh Football Association at the International match played at Wrexham between Ireland and Wales. We went to Wynnstay Hotel, Wrexham. The Doctor of the Ministry of Mines who had been with us during the recovery operations and of whom I have often referred, together with the Mines Inspector from Doncaster invited us to Dinner and afterwards a night at the Majestic in Wrexham, Didn't we enjoy that dinner in Wrexham and we shall always look back to those times with our 'Doc' as some of the brightest moments of our really drab job and monotonous life at that time. For that period Rescue Men were film stars and all the Picture Houses, even in London and Manchester were screening pictures of the Rescue Men going to and from the pit cage.

Before I conclude, let me here, say a word or two of praise for those volunteers who directly after the first explosion, worked hard and continuously until the time all men were withdrawn. They were at work all Saturday night clearing falls of roof, carrying thousands of fire extinguishers, drinking water, coffee and sandwiches anything and everything. There was 200 of these men down on Sunday midday. Some of them had been down all Saturday night and they would not give in probably they would have been down all Sunday till Monday morning had the men withdrawn. Working in all kinds of dangerous places where falls of roof had occurred sometimes in terrific heat. They worked ungrudgingly. No thought of pay. Their only thought being to get their comrades out of it as soon as possible. Officials were there whose names have never been mentioned. Llay Main officials Manager, Undermanager, Overmen and Deputies who all stood the strain from Saturday morning until the end. Gresford Officials of course were always on the spot. It is no fault for these people or for the need of help that the bodies are still down the pit.

Those cars owners also are to be thanked. as each black face came up the pit in that Sunday there was always a free fight who of those car owners should have the privilege of taking you home in his car. That was the kind of spirit which seemed to emit from all those people. A true Christian spirit which seemed to emit from all those people and will be remembered by us to our dying day. We may all be in normal life, in classes apart, but in times of need such as this, even the highest comes down to the low level of their poorer more unfortunate brothers. Thank God this is the true spirit of Britishers on all occasions of this description, The generous response of the Country to the appeal makes the same spirit more manifest. Nearly half a million pounds subscribed. Rich and poor, both to the same extent doing what was possible to generosity and we are indebted for life to those subscribers.

A FEW HINTS TO PROSPECTIVE RESCUE MEN

After 22 years experience of this work and having been called in to two explosions, many 'gob Fires' and various other kinds of work which only men wearing the apparatus could do, I think my experience may be of use to others if ever that undesirable call comes your way.

1). First of all my advice is, 'Be master of your apparatus. Convergent with the functioning of the valves and careful of the breathing pipe joints. Remember at all times, TRUST NO MAN TO SEE THAT YOUR EQUIPMENT IS PERFECT. Test it for yourself and be satisfied. It is your life that depends on that apparatus, and not the other chaps.

2). Listen to the instructions given by those in authority what is to be done not how it is to be done. Make the how your part of the business. Those in authority on the surface, don't know how the job should be done, or they would not want men with apparatus. they probably are not aware of the changes which have taken place since they were at the spot previously. Follow only the Captain's instructions. You may think this is wrong but don't attempt to argue. That will be fatal. You do the work and the Captain will do the planning.

3). "Don't be worried or hurried by any person whatever his status may be even if you have one of H.M. Inspectors down with you. Take you own time - Self Preservation is the first law of nature and if you cannot save yourself, how can you rescue or save anyone else? Always remember that you hold the key to the situation with the apparatus, and that you consider yourself master of the situation."

4). "Do not think for a moment that you have got the heaviest load to carry and that it is time someone else took the load. This will create a bad spirit amongst your Team Mates. Your Captain will see that you are 'eased'. Trust him to put to the utmost advantage of every member of the Team, so that he will be sure that no member is more 'distressed' than another when the time comes to retire'.

5). "If you are afraid, don't under any circumstances, go down the pit to be an encumbrance to your Team Mates, Better for you to go back home, or do not go to the place at all. If you go and can not pull your weight' then the other members have more than their fair share and may possibly be taking on more than they have bargained for.

6). "Don't swell too big for the apparatus, or you may not be able to operate your valves, and they will tighten on you by forgetting to listen for that lovely 'click, click' of the intake valve. Keep you head, be cool and understudied by the admiration of others looking at you, forget everything outside your team work.

7). Whilst it is the duty of your Captain to read the gauge on your equipment, read it for yourself also. he does it because it is the rule, you read it because it is your life which is at stake. If there comes a sudden leakage in your pipe between the times laid down by the Captain's readings, and your oxygen is spent, what is your position? So read your gauge often. I have often taken readings of gauges according to the rules laid down every 20 minutes, where for the first hour on each of the three readings, each member of the Team has consumed practically the same amount of oxygen but taken the fourth reading I have found one member's consumption to be nearly double any of the previous 20 minutes. Possibly he had caught the bye-pass valve and opened it unnoticed, and the result had been a wastage of the most precious commodity in existence under

such circumstances.

8). In view of No.7 let me press on you at all times, be sure your bye-pass is not open when you think it is closed, and by continually reading your gauge will assure you of this and also warn you if you have any leakage in your breathing bag.

9). Clean your equipment, assemble it, and take care of it, treat it as a friend and you will find that on occasions when you have nothing else to depend on except your 'Proto' it will return your friendship a thousand times and never let you down.

The Inquiry is over, and the findings are 'Explosion caused from spark from a telephone '. The brains of the Mining Industry have been probing into the whole matter and have come to that conclusion. I have my own opinion, and from the evidence of men working in that disastrous area I do not agree. Still there it is. The most hurtful part of the whole job is that we Rescue Men were stopped when we were going so well, the work coming quite easily to us and travelling so well towards the area. Another few weeks would have solved the unsolved mystery. There is no doubt in my mind that we would have found evidence to prove the cause of the explosion and would had seen some of the bodies. we had no voice in it and it is no use commenting further on it, but finish by saying I am sorry that we did not have the opportunity of carrying on with the work. I would suggest that the last part added would go in continuation to the Inquiry Report previously written. I may add I had no invitation to attend the Inquiry, it was moved from Wrexham to London and there whole thing closed.

© Ian Winstanley 1999